

Design Resource

Dahi Handi

The Festival of Janmashtami

by

Palash Vaswani

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/dahi-handi>

1. Introduction
2. In Mumbai
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Source:<http://dsource.in/resource/dahi-handi/introduction>

Introduction

Lord Krishna, one of the most famous God of Hindu religion, was born on the eight day (Ashtami) of the month of Shravana and on the Rohini Nakshatram. Janmashtami is the celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna. It is also called as Gokulashtami. Bhagvan Krishna was born at midnight between first and second day. During midnight actual festival begins by bathing lord's idol with Panchamrit (a mixture of milk, ghee, oil, honey & gangajal) and then dressing him up with colorful cloths, flower decorations and swing the cradle. Devotees celebrate this event by singing songs in praise of the God and perform the aarti by blowing a conch (Shankh).

According to Puranas, Krishna is one of the avatars of lord Vishnu. The objective of his birth was to kill the King Kansa, his maternal uncle and to free his parents, King Vasudev and Devki, and the people of Mathura from the cruelty of King Kansa. With the fear of prophecy of Kansa getting killed by the eighth son Krishna, he threw Vasudev and Devki in prison. He then started killed all the newborns of the couple one by one. Then the eighth son Krishna was born. At the time of his birth many miracles occurred. Devki and Vasudev became unfettered, all the guards fell asleep and the prison gates opened. A heavenly voice blessed the child and asked Vasudev to take his son to his friend Nand and his wife Yashoda, who stayed in Gokul across the river Yamuna. On that rainy night the flooded river made its way for the father and son after Lord Krishna's tiny foot touched the water. The Sheshnaag also came up to protect both of them from the heavy rainfall.

In Gokul, Yashoda had given birth to a baby girl. While Yashoda and her daughter were asleep, Vasudev quietly kept his son there and took back the baby girl to Mathura. When Kansa informed about birth of eighth child, he rushed to the prison to kill the infant. As soon as Kansa took the position to hit the child on stone, it flew up in the air and announced that his demolisher was born and in safe hands. Finally Kansa was killed by Krishna.

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In Mumbai

Janmaashtami is celebrated as Dahi Handi in Mumbai with enormous zeal and enthusiasm. This is also called as Gopalkala. Dahi Handi generally takes place on the second day of Janmashtami. An earthen pot containing a mixture of milk, dry fruits, ghee is hung around 20-30 feet high in the air with the help of a rope. Enthusiastic young men form a human pyramid by standing one on top of the other, trying to break the pot. Onlookers throw water on the young men in order to prevent them from doing so. Breaking of the pot is followed by prize distribution. Devotees believe the broken pieces of earthen pot will keep away mice and negative powers from their homes.

Various handis are set up locally in several parts of the city, and groups of youngsters, called govinda, travel around in trucks trying to break as many handis as possible during the day. Not only young men but girls too jump onto the streets for breaking handis.

Some of the famous handis are at Dadar, Lower Parel, Worli, Mazgaon, Lalbaug and Thane. Cash and gifts are offered for Govinda troops (Pathak) to participate; for over 4000 handis in Mumbai, 2000 Govinda troops compete for the prizes. Nearly every big dahi handi is affiliated to a political party. Higher cash prize means larger crowd. The attractive prize money, presence of film stars and live performers is lending a glamour quotient to the festival.

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Slide Show



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This documentation was done by Palash Vaswani, Design Associate, at **IDC, IIT Bombay**.

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